

The Maine Event by javajunkie

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Romance

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Will Byers

Relationships: Joyce Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-10-29

Updated: 2017-10-29

Packaged: 2022-04-02 01:47:56

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,536

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

When Hopper finds out that the Byers are moving to Maine, he is forced to consider his feelings for Joyce with unexpected help from Eleven.

Set post-Season 2.

The Maine Event

The Maine Event

Hopper came home after a long day of chasing down some young assholes vandalizing teacher's houses, to find Eleven waiting for him on the couch, a half-eaten waffle resting on the couch cushion beside her. She looked up at him and said, "You're late."

"Yeah, sorry. I got a call across town and it took longer than expected." He walked over to the refrigerator and threw over his shoulder, "Did you eat your dinner before that waffle?"

"Yes."

Eleven walked over to the kitchen table and sat down, watching Hopper quietly as he heated up his dinner. He noticed that she still jumped when the microwave dinged. He pulled his dinner out and sat across from her.

"How was school?"

"Good."

"Did you learn anything?"

Eleven nodded slowly. "We learned about *Romeo and Juliet*."

"Star-crossed lovers," he said between bites of meatloaf. "I never liked them. Take it from an adult, love shouldn't be that difficult."

Eleven considered this for a moment and then asked, "How should love be?"

Hopper chewed slowly, trying to think of the best way to put it, and then told her, "It's not easy. Nothing that matters should be. But, it's wanting the best for someone. Putting their needs before your own, even when it's not convenient."

After a beat, Eleven asked, "Like you and Joyce?"

Hopper nearly choked on his mashed potatoes. He swallowed messily and wiped at his mouth with the back of his hand. "I didn't mean like me and Joyce. We're friends."

"But, don't you love her?"

"Well, sure, but there are different types of love. There's platonic love, like Joyce and me. Then there's family love – "

"Like you and me?" Eleven asked.

He smiled softly. "Yeah, kid. Like you and me. And then there's romantic love. Do you understand?"

Eleven nodded slowly. "Platonic love. Family love. Romantic love."

"There you go. You've got it."

She was quiet for a moment before she asked, "Are you sure that you don't romantic love Joyce?"

The next morning, Hopper dragged himself out of bed, his mind hazy from a night of little sleep. He couldn't fall asleep, the hours ticking by as he stared at his ceiling until his alarm mercifully went off at 6:00 a.m. He made himself and Eleven breakfast before pulling on an old uniform – his forgot to put his new one in the wash, again – and driving Eleven to school. When he got to the police station he was greeted by the glorious smell of fresh coffee and donuts. He happily took one of each – ignoring his secretary's comments about his health – and went to close himself up in his office and maybe catch a quick fifteen minute nap. He stopped short when he heard one of his officers say, "Yeah, it'll be a lot quieter down here without the Byers. We may be out of a job."

He almost let it go, thinking that what that comment inferred wasn't possible, but his curiosity got the best of him and he turned

back and asked, “What are you talking about with the Byers?”

“Didn’t you hear? They’re moving to Maine.”

“They’re *what*?” he snapped.

“We just heard word this morning,” his secretary said. “That poor family, they’ve been through so much. First with Will going missing and then poor Bob and that accident. I heard he was barely recognizable after he was pulled from the wreckage.”

Hopper’s jaw tightened as he recalled what actually happened to Bob the Brain. The dank smell of blood. Joyce screaming.

“Maybe some change will do them good,” she said wistfully.

Hopper got a call halfway through the day to check out some graffiti on a house near the west side of town – it seemed to be by those same punk kids – and on his way back to the station he stopped at the Byers house. He was pretty sure that Joyce didn’t work on Tuesdays, and sure enough, he pulled up behind her rusted car. He tried to check his emotions as he hopped out of his truck and strode up to the front door, but when she answered the door, all he could say was, “Why the hell are you moving to Maine?”

He pushed past her into the house as she said, “How did you-“

“Why the hell are you doing this? And why did I have to find out from some officer at work?”

“Okay, first of all, I don’t really see how this is any of your business,” Joyce said, irritably flicking her bangs away from her eyes. “This is about my family and I am doing what’s best for them.”

“What’s best for them? Really? You think taking Will away

from his friends is the best thing for him?”

“He’ll make friends in Maine.”

“After everything he’s been through, he needs to be around people who understand him. People who know what happened.”

“No, he needs a fresh start,” she returned defiantly. “We all do.”

“Joyce, this is ridiculous.”

“No, it’s not.”

“You can’t just take your boys away from everything that they know. You can’t do this –“

“No, I can’t stay here!” she yelled back, eyes wide and glassy. “I can’t stay *here*, Hopper. I’ve tried. I really have. But everywhere I turn, I’m reminded of what happened. I almost lost him. *Twice*. I almost lost my boy twice. And Bob...” she trailed off, wiping at her nose. “This place is diseased. And I don’t want it poisoning my family anymore.”

“What happened is over, Joyce. It’s over.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Come on, Joyce-“

“We don’t know that,” she repeated, voice hard. “We thought it was over the first time, and then...that *thing*...almost took Will. And that’s not even all of it. It’s not just the upside down or the mind-whatever. He’s being bullied at school again and –“

“What?” Hopper muttered, his shoulders slackening. It seemed unfair that after everything Will Byers went through, he also had to be subjected to routine middle school cruelty.

“I didn’t know, either,” Joyce said dejectedly. “I thought it got better, but at the last parent-teacher conference they told me. I felt like such an idiot not knowing. What sort of parent doesn’t

notice that something like that is happening?”

“Kids are good at hiding that sort of thing.”

“I should have known. I should have noticed something.”

“Well, give me the kids’ names. I’ll talk to them.”

Joyce shook her head. “We’re past that, Hopper. We need a fresh start. Somewhere no one knows us. This is what is best for my family.”

Joyce sat down heavily on the sofa and Hopper settled next to her. He leaned forward and rested his arms on his knees. They were quiet for a long while. Joyce’s despair was almost palpable, and it bothered Hopper more than he cared to admit.

“I’m sorry that I came in here so hot,” Hopper murmured. “I was just surprised.”

“I know.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

Joyce took a deep breath. “I guess I didn’t want you to talk me out of it.”

Hopper chuckled darkly. “Am I that predictable?”

She looked over at him.

“Yes. But only to me.”

Hopper smiled a bit, although it felt as if an entire box of cement blocks had fallen on his chest. “So, when are you moving?”

“Next month.”

“Shit, that soon?”

“It’s been in the works for a while,” she said.

“How did the boys take it?”

Joyce took a deep breath. “Not well. Jonathan especially. They’ve come around to it, though. Somewhat. Jonathan still isn’t speaking to me but...they’ll see it was for the best.”

Hopper took a deep breath and said, “Any chance I can talk you out of this?”

Joyce shook her head and said, “No. You can’t.”

With Joyce’s plans out in the open, Hopper did what he always did with Joyce and her family, and that was help. He didn’t agree with their moving, but he boxed up odds and ends, anyway, attempting to thaw the ice between Joyce and Jonathan along the way. He gave Will pep talks about the new kids he’d meet in Maine and looked up the best arcades near their new apartment. He worked hard to sell what he really thought was an idiotic plan, but it seemed worth it when he saw Jonathan help Joyce move a piece of furniture or Will cracked a smile. He didn’t think that the Byers needed Maine to heal, but that is what Joyce thought, so he went along with it.

One day, after tackling the Byers’, frankly, horrifying basement, Hopper collapsed on the couch and Eleven methodically said, “You should tell Joyce that you romantic love her. Maybe then they’ll stay.”

He looked over at her in confusion and said, “What are you talking about?”

“You romantic love her.”

“No, I don’t.”

Eleven levelly returned, “Yes, you do.”

Hopper laughed humorlessly and said, “No offense, kid, but I think I have a little more experience in this arena than you do. And I don’t...” he trailed off, the words suddenly feeling strange in his

mouth, "...I definitely don't..."

"See?" Eleven said easily. "You romantic love her."

Hopper didn't believe it then. He didn't believe it when he went to sleep. And he didn't believe it when he woke up the next morning, feeling hungover without a single drink the night before. He didn't believe it until he was stopped at a red light on his way to work, and suddenly realized that in only a few days, Joyce Byers would no longer be a part of his life. Panic flooded his chest and he didn't notice that the red light turned to green until the person behind him irritably blared his horn. He drove to her workplace without much thought, his mind preoccupied by the aforementioned panicking and envisioning all the ways his life would be complete and utter shit without her.

He parked his car in a daze and strode into the store. She was working the aisles today and he said, "Joyce, I need to talk to you right now."

"Hop, I'm sort of in the middle of working. Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, absolutely. Everything's fine," he said, regretting that he worried her, "I just – I really need to talk to you. Can you take a break?"

Joyce glanced around the store and murmured, "I guess the store's pretty dead right now. Okay. Five minutes."

"Do you have somewhere private we can go?"

Joyce's eyes flashed and she said, "Um, sure, we can go to the back storage room. Follow me."

They walked to the back and piled into the storage room. The moment the door closed, Joyce said, "Okay, what's wrong? I can tell something is going on."

"No, nothing's going on. I promise."

She nodded, rubbing her hands nervously on her pants.

“Okay. Then what’s all this about?”

Hopper took off his hat, suddenly wishing he’d planned this out a bit more. He smoothed his hair down and looked around the storage area. There were a lot of odds and ends, and a surprising number of Christmas lights for mid-April. His gaze finally settled back on Joyce, who looked somewhere between annoyed and confused.

“Hopper-“

“I don’t want you to move to Maine.”

She sighed softly and said, “Hopper, we talked about this.”

“I know, but hear me out. There is going to be danger anywhere you go. You can’t avoid that. But, what you have here is unique –“

“Yeah, a never-ending parade of horrors descending on my son.”

“No,” Hopper said, stepping closer to her. “You have people who are on your side. People who would do anything for you. Will has his friends, who may have done more to save him than anyone else. Those kids are stronger together than apart, Joyce. And you...” he stepped even closer, “...you have me. And I promise you, I will not let anyone – or anything- hurt you or your family again.”

“Hop-“

He closed the distance between them and framed her face with his hands. “I love you, Joyce. And, I promise you, I will keep you safe. If it’s the last thing I do, I will not let anything hurt you.”

Before she could respond, he leaned forward and pressed his mouth against hers. It was a soft kiss, and when she didn’t return it, he pulled away with a heavy feeling in the base of his stomach. He’d made a fool of himself for nothing. He cleared his throat and said, “I’m sorry, Joyce. I’ll just –“

She cut him off with her mouth against his, her hands resting

lightly on his chest. He kissed her back and all the tentativeness of before was stripped away as she slid her hands up his chest and around his neck, crushing him against her. He'd wanted to do this for far longer than he would ever admit. Her hair tickled his face and she tasted just like he'd imagined. After a few minutes, breathing became necessary and they pulled apart, both breathing heavily with their foreheads touching.

“Joyce.”

“I need to get back to work,” she said in a shaky voice, pulling away from him with an unreadable expression on her face. He watched her walk out of the storage room, wondering what the hell just happened.

Hopper didn't hear from her that day. Or the next. When he didn't hear from her by the weekend, he figured that he wouldn't hear from her at all. The Byers were moving on Sunday, after all, and that seemed more important than an ill-time declaration of love in the Melvad's General Store storage room. He offered to help them move, but that was before the storage room and he didn't think his offer would be accepted any longer. Thus, on Sunday, instead of helping the Byers move, he settled on his couch with a beer and his favorite Western. Eleven settled next to him on the couch and noted, “You're sad.”

He took a long drag of his beer and said, “Yeah, kid, I am.”

Eleven tucked herself against his side and he slid an arm around her shoulders, feeling a bit less like shit. She dozed off somewhere around a third through the movie, but woke up startled when there was a knock on the door. She inadvertently jabbed her elbow into Hopper's side, and he swore softly before he stood up to answer the door. Hopper opened the door and was surprised to see the Byers family there with KFC bags.

“Joyce, what are you doing here?”

“It’s been a while since we’ve all had dinner together,” she said, lifting one of the bags. “I thought we could do one tonight.”

He nodded, still confused, and said, “Yeah, sure. Come in.”

Will pushed his way into Hopper’s apartment and told Eleven excitedly, “We’re not moving anymore!”

Hopper looked over at Joyce and hesitantly asked, “You aren’t?”

She smiled and shook her head. “We’re not.”

He wasn’t convinced, and asked, “Is your place not ready or...”

“We’re staying in Hawkins,” Joyce told him. She reached forward with and took his hands in hers. “For good.”